

Fact Sheet

State Water Resources Control Board California Environmental Protection Agency

Vehicle Maintenance Activities

Reducing Polluted Runoff from Your Vehicles

- **Getting the Car Washed**



When washing vehicles or other equipment outdoors, try to confine all cleaning materials to a bucket (so it can later be emptied

inside your house or other building where all drains lead to water quality treatment plants). The streets and/or drainage ditches outside your house almost always lead directly to local creeks, rivers, lakes, and/or the ocean.

- **Keeping in Tune**

- **Recycle Auto Fluids**

- **Auto Parts Disposal**

In washing your car at home, you can use both solar energy and the universal solvent (water) to your own and your local environment's advantage here.

First, pick a sunny day to wash your vehicle(s). Next, wet down the vehicle(s) and then let the sun warm up the water on the vehicle(s) (so it will more quickly dissolve dust, dirt, etc.). Then wipe down the vehicle(s), and almost all the 'dirt' will come off in the now warm solvent (water). Only oils may not, as they are not water-soluble.

Next, put just a small amount of detergent, glass cleaner, or other cleaner of your choice in a bucket or on a cleaning cloth, and wipe off any remaining oils and smudges still on your vehicle(s). Be sure to dump this bucket into a drain inside your house or other building; such as down a laundry sink, bathtub, or a toilet, as all these lead to water treatment plants. The cleaning compounds, which are toxic to aquatic life, will thus be removed before the treated water is released into your local or regional environment.

Then you are done with your vehicle washing using minimal 'work' (human labor), and at minimal expense to both yourself and the environment.

You can also just rinse your car where the runoff will go onto landscaped areas, which will filter out any pollutants before they

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reach a local water body. Vegetated or landscaped areas are destination for any vehicle washing rinse water, too. However, be careful to never wash any solvents, detergents or any cleaners into a storm drain, street gutter, roadside ditch, or any open roadside areas. Even if not until the next big rain, 'dumped' materials will only too soon be on their way to polluting local waters.

If you can afford it and wish to use commercial car washes, make sure you have your vehicles washed where the combined rinse water, detergents, and other cleaning compounds are all collected for water quality treatment. Make sure the commercial car wash you use does not simply drain to the street or an open drainage ditch. Again, these would lead directly, without treatment, to your local creeks, rivers, lakes, and/or the ocean.

Keeping the Engine Tuned, Leaks Repaired:



Almost all automotive fluids are highly toxic, even to household pets (anti-freeze tastes sweet to animals, and they will often lap up these leaking substances from your driveway or garage floor). To avoid unnecessary water pollution, as well as to insure better gas mileage, keep your car in good mechanical condition, and particularly have any evident leaks promptly fixed.

Recycling Used Motor Oil, Batteries, Used oil Filters & Disposing of Other Automotive Fluids:

Always recycle or reuse any automotive materials or parts, as long as vehicle emissions do not increase. Keep in mind that as soon as it rains, air pollution becomes local water pollution. For non-oil automotive fluids, such as antifreeze, recycle them by taking them into your auto parts retailer or your auto repair facility, or take to a Household Hazardous Waste collection center for environmentally safe disposal. You can find the nearest Household Hazardous Wastes disposal center by using 'Earth's 911'

go to <http://www.earth911.org/>



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Miscellaneous auto parts disposal for people who do their own auto repair work at home:

Generally, metal auto parts can be recycled, but should be rinsed first with solvents (with this rinse water not draining anywhere outside). Or, you can collect the rinse water in a covered, leak proof container for disposal at a Household Hazardous Waste Clean up site. Again, contact 'Earth's 911' to find the collection center nearest you.

Vehicle engine oil and oil filters themselves should always be recycled, including draining out the excess oil from used oil filters before storing even briefly in a leak proof covered container for recycling. For inadvertent spills of automotive fluids, soak them up with kitty litter, sawdust, or some similar absorbent material you have on hand, and then place it in a non-leaky covered garbage can, or other container.

Remember to store motor oil for recycling in a covered container, which doesn't leak. Oil in uncovered containers can become diluted with rainwater, and interfere with your recycling and

pollution prevention efforts. Treat any accidental spills of any automotive fluid as mentioned above. Used vehicle batteries need proper disposal. Seal up any leaky ones for safety to transport back to your auto parts retailer. Or take them in to a Household Hazardous Wastes collection site – see web links above. Used tires disposal is at auto tire retailers and some waste collection sites. Keep in mind that used dumped tires are both a human health hazard (they hold water for breeding mosquitoes, including disease carrying ones), and an environmental degrader.

Also, never dump motor oil or any other automotive fluid down a storm drain, in a street gutter, roadside ditch, or in any open roadside areas. Be advised all these 'dumped' materials will all soon be on their way to pollute local waters, even if not until it rains or someone nearby over waters, causing local runoff.

Questions and Comments:

For more information on the state's Nonpoint Source Program, see our web-site:

<http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/nps/index.html>